

## Long Distance Romantic Relationships

Making a romantic relationship work can be difficult even when living in close proximity to your partner. At Cornell there are dozens of faculty, staff, and visiting scholars who are living away from family, friends, and familiar territory. Nourishing healthy intimacy while coping with the added pressure of being apart can be especially challenging. It takes a special blend of trust, commitment, and communication between both partners to maintain a successful long-distance relationship.

### Keys to success

Approximately 7 million couples in the United States consider themselves to be in long distance relationships. These relationships include 2.5 to 3 million long distance marriages with some studies suggesting rates of long distance marriage as high as 10-16%. Successful long distance relationships depend upon discussing and committing to a basic set of strategies and values. Consider the following:

- **Effective communication.** It's important for both parties to feel that communication with their partner will be welcomed and responded to with interest and love. The quality of the relationship is more likely to increase if both people develop the ability to share feelings openly with each other.
- **Commitment.** It's critical that there be demonstrated commitment to the relationship by both parties. What kind of commitment, and how serious or light it is, will be different for different couples.
- **Willingness to take risks and secure trust.** Being so far apart can be a scary and risky endeavor for most couples, so there should be a willingness to take risks with solid and secure trust between the two people. This doesn't mean that each person needs to skydive from a plane, but rather, that each will trust that the other person's life in his or her own town will not be a threat to the relationship. If trust is not already in place, then it's important for both partners to make conscious effort to work on it - both on their own and together.
- **Independence.** It's important that people in long-term relationships be able to function independently (autonomously) while still getting some of their emotional needs met by the other person. With an appropriate balance of independence and dependence, each person is allowed, even encouraged, to grow and change as an individual, thus bringing new energy to the relationship. It is not wise or healthy to expect your partner or you to stay exactly the same as when the relationship started.
- **Mutual respect.** When the preceding elements are present another key element tends to naturally emerge: mutual respect.
- **Clear expectations.** Finally, having clear expectations for behavior is critical to fostering a successful long-term relationship. Be clear in your own expectations of the other person and the relationship, and discuss them with your partner so that you can work out differences as they arise.

### Nourishing a long distance relationship

Nourishing any relationship involves expressing love by actions and by active 'presence' which is not only spending physical time with another person but also giving him or her undivided attention when you are together. The absence of shared-space 'presence' is a huge liability in long distance relationships; here are some ideas on how to create a bridge for you and your partner.

- A long distance relationship is no different from a proximal (close distance) relationship in that they both require a great deal of work, excellent communication, patience, sacrifice and understanding. Make a commitment to not let your daily life interfere with your desire to be with the other person.



- It's tough to connect when one person gets busier than the other. If you're the busy person, try to warn your partner ahead of time that you will be working many hours and may have limited time to connect. If you're the not-as-busy person, take advantage of your free time. Flexibility is very important.
- It helps to know when the time away from one another will end, no matter how far away it is. Without an established endpoint, the relationship can become increasingly distant—even with great communication. Knowing the endpoint allows each person to work hard and to cultivate hope.
- Plan for your visits with one other. Select activities your partner enjoys (hobbies, day-to-day activities, etc.) and schedule them into your next rendezvous.
- Phone/email/IM communication can get bland over time. Use a webcam so you can chat "face-to-face" and see each other so when you meet you'll remember how your partner looks.
- Consider other ways to interact, e.g., choose a game that you can play together over the internet, whether it is a MMORPG (massively multi-player online role playing game) or something more traditional, such as chess or scrabble. You'll be able to chat while playing and it will give a greater feeling of togetherness.
- Mail each other scented clothes or if you can see each other once a week, leave a t-shirt scented with perfume or cologne for your partner before you leave.
- Send each other spontaneous e-cards and real letters, packages, and cards.
- Make a creative countdown calendar and mail it to your partner to enjoy until you see each other next. For example, create a photo calendar with something you add for each day to describe what you love about them.
- Create a special activity/event and tell your partner that a surprise is on tap for the next visit.
- Don't be afraid to talk about the "boring" parts of your day. The trickier, almost subconscious part is maintaining the feeling of being intermingled in your partner's life which is a key ingredient to having the intimacy of "interrelatedness."
- Spice things up by meeting halfway (if it's within a reasonable distance) to grab a bite to eat or get some coffee. This is a great alternative if you're not able to dedicate an entire weekend with your significant other.
- Avoid talking on the phone TOO often.

## Seeking Help

As if relationships weren't complicated enough, having them across a long distance is extremely challenging. Throughout time couples have had to be miles apart, but managed to maintain a solid, happy, successful relationship until they could be together again. In order to find success there are some key elements that are necessary; without them relationships may endure, but they may not be healthy or fulfilling. If you're having difficulty maintaining a long distance relationship or are about to embark on a long distance relationship challenge and are unsure about how to plan for it, then take advantage of FSAP's experience and professional expertise in this relationship area. We can be reached at 255-2673, 8:30-5:00, Monday through Friday.



### Hours:

In-person consultation	
Monday-Friday	8:30 am-5:00 pm
24/7 phone consultation	607-255-2673

### Faculty and Staff Assistance Program

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